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## MARGARET FULLER IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS.

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Contributed by Richard V. Carpenter.

It is the gift of genius that it can touch with a magic pen a locality otherwise not distinguished, and brighten it with an interest which the place itself would never possess. Many of the people conceived by a master mind of fiction and placed by his imagination in a particular locality, become more real than those who have lived, struggled and died in that place and whose actual handiwork is visible all about it.

Rip Van Winkle, the Headless Horseman and the Culprit Fay, have a very positive existence along the Hudson; Deerslayer and Uncas still live in the region made famous by Cooper; while Walden Pond and the Old Manse at Concord possess a charm which their natural beauties would never have given them.

In 1843 Margaret Fuller made a visit to Northern Illinois. Her impressions are recorded in a part of the book known as "At Home and Abroad."\* The region over which she traveled, while then almost unsettled and undeveloped, has since become one of the most prosperous in the country. It has leisure now to gather together its legends and its literature and the records of its past. Some day the pen of a Parkman, a Prescott, or a Lossing will adequately set down the wonderful and stirring story of this great State of Illinois, as rich in material as the east. In the meantime let us record, in a matter of fact way, a few incidents of the short trip of this gifted woman through the valleys of the Fox, the Kishwaukee,

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\*Miss Fuller also described her visit to Northern Illinois in a little book entitled, "Summer on the Lakes in 1843," published, 1844.

and the Rock rivers; a trip which is still, along some parts of the latter river at least, the chief literary association.

Margaret Fuller arrived in Chicago by the way of steamer on the Great Lakes, in the latter part of June, 1843. Chicago at that day was a city of about 7,600 people. The buildings were mostly along North and South Water Streets and that portion of LaSalle, Clark and Dearborn connected with them, or in other words, in that part of the present down-town district adjoining the river. There was a ferry boat at Rush Street and a swinging bridge at Clark Street, where now the great tide of traffic from the North to the South side surges all day long. Snipe and plover were shot on the West side, where now stretch miles of residences, pike and bass were caught in the river, that wonderful river, then a limpid stream, afterwards to become a body of viscid mud and which today considerably improved in purity, is probably the only stream in the world which flows toward its original source.

The Fullers, being Unitarians, were close friends with James Freeman Clarke, then perhaps the leading minister of that denomination. Mr. Clarke's brothers lived in Chicago, where they conducted a large drug store. Their mother and a sister also lived in that city, the residence evidently being in the present down-town district, near the lake and not far from the site of Fort Dearborn. The firm first consisted of William Hull Clarke and Abram F. Clarke. They opened a drug store on South Water Street, near Franklin, in 1835, being the third in Chicago. They afterward occupied another position on South Water Street and one on Lake Street and removed in 1840 to the Tremont Building, at the corner of Dearborn and Lake streets, where they remained until 1851. In 1843 the firm was known as Clarke & Co., consisting of W. H., Samuel C. Clarke and John C. Shaw. Wm. Hull Clarke became City Engineer for Chicago in 1855 and

remained in the employ of the city until his death in 1878, aged about 66 years.

Miss Fuller's first impression of the city was one of loneliness, a feeling which so often came over those from the East when they beheld the vast stretch of prairie and longed for the hills and valleys of their homes. She spent considerable time on the lake shore, and enjoyed the wild flowers, which were very plentiful on the prairies. In a few days she began to enjoy the new scenery and in her account says: "But after I had ridden out, and seen the flowers, and observed the sun set with that calmness seen only in the prairies, and the cattle winding slowly to their homes in the 'Island groves'—most peaceful of sights—I began to love, because I began to know the scene, and shrank no longer from 'the encircling vastness.' While there were no mountains and no valleys, there were beautiful starlit heavens and the moonlight falling on the lake and the sunsets of usual beauty and calmness." The people of Chicago still love their city and do not long for the mountains and valleys, but there are few wild flowers on State and Madison Streets now. The moon shines with less clearness through the atmosphere, and a net work of railroad tracks lies between the city and the shore of the lake where Miss Fuller walked upon the sand. Chicago still has its beauties, it is a wonderful city, but they are those of a teeming, complex civilization rather than those of nature.

After a few days spent in Chicago a party was made up for an excursion of two or three weeks into the country. Included therein, besides Miss Fuller, was William Clarke and his sister. He is the one described as the guide, "equally admirable as marshall and companion, who knew by heart the country and its history, both natural and artificial, and whose clear hunter's eye needed neither road nor goal to guide it to all the spots where beauty best loves to dwell." It is stated by one of Miss Fuller's biographers that Mr. Clarke at that

time was somewhat discouraged and had begun to lose the elasticity of youth under the burden of his discouragements, but that Margaret's sympathy discovered the depth and delicacy of his character and her unconquerable spirit lifted him to cheerfulness and he received courage which never more forsook him. They started in a strong wagon, well provisioned, and drawn by two stalwart horses. The first day's journey was through the country which lies directly west of Chicago and between it and the Fox river. She speaks of woods rich in moccasin flower and lupine. They crossed the Des-Plaines river and must have followed substantially the route now taken by the Northwestern railroad, passing in the vicinity of Wheaton, where Wheaton college was afterward founded. They must have also passed through West Chicago, now a busy railroad junction and the early home of the financier, John W. Gates. In the evening they arrived at Geneva, just in time to escape being drenched by a violent thunder shower. The clouds and the strange light gave an added interest to the landscape on the latter part of the journey. They were now in the valley of the Fox. This pleasant stream, rising in Wisconsin, flows in a southeasterly direction past Dundee, one of the centers of the great dairy region of Northern Illinois, past Elgin with its watch factory, past the thriving cities of Geneva and Aurora, and joins with the Des-Plaines at Ottawa to form the Illinois. The journey by rail to Geneva now takes about an hour. Along somewhat the same course that they had taken during the day, General Winfield Scott marched his regulars in 1832 to the scene of conflict in the Black Hawk War. Geneva, where Margaret and the party stopped for the night, is now the county seat of Kane county. It then contained, as it still does, many persons of New England descent; indeed all of the Northern counties of Illinois were largely settled from New England or New York.

Among the early inhabitants of Geneva was a little flock of Unitarians, with their beloved pastor, Rev. Augustus H. Conant. Mr. Conant had come west just before reaching the age of twenty-one and walked through Northern Illinois, finally locating near Chicago on the DesPlaines river. He became interested in the Unitarian faith through reading a copy of the "Western Messenger," which was being published by James Freeman Clarke, at Louisville, and decided to prepare for the ministry back east. After returning from Cambridge he located in Geneva in 1842. He found there a number of Unitarians, several from the West Church of Boston. Services were held, although a church was not built until 1843. As Miss Fuller indicates in her account, Mr. Conant was considerable of a carpenter and fashioned with his own hands much of the furniture and wood work about the house, the concise entries in the journal of the courageous pioneer-clergymen indicating the wide range of his occupations in the unsettled country. Sometimes he sets down the sad task of making a coffin for his sister, sometimes he killed a wolf or hunted deer, sometimes he preached at Geneva or at neighboring towns, or read philosophical and religious works. The church building, as has been said, was built in 1843, and in 1844 it was dedicated, Miss Fuller's brother, Arthur B., who was then teaching school in Belvidere, conducting part of the services. Mr. Conant removed to Rockford in 1857 and became pastor of a large congregation there, but when the call of "Father Abraham" rang across the corn fields of Northern Illinois, he joined one of the regiments as chaplain and gave up his life, Feb. 1863, as result of exposure while caring for the wounded on the battlefield at Murfreesboro. Mr. Conant's people until recently have lived at Rockford, but are now on the Pacific coast.

After a day or two at Geneva, where the gentlemen found good fishing in the Fox river, they started south along the river bank. They stopped that night at the

home of an English gentleman; just where or who this was, the writer does not know, but Miss Fuller is very enthusiastic as to his large library and comfortable dwelling and the accomplishments of his daughter, who combined a knowledge of music and French with the ability to take care of the milk room and kill rattle-snakes. The next day they crossed the Fox river, the ladies going by a small foot bridge, while the wagon passed over at the ford. Another thunder storm came up and they were obliged to take refuge in a solitary house upon the prairie, of which Miss Fuller says: "In this house we found a family quite above the common, but I grieve to say, not above false pride, for the father, ashamed of being caught barefoot, told us a story of a man, one of the richest men, he said, in one of the Eastern cities, who went barefoot, from choice." In the afternoon they started again, evidently across the southern end of DeKalb county, through the blooming plain unmarked by any road. The grass was tall and stretched for miles on the prairies and here and there, like islands, were the groves of great trees with the small log houses clustered at their edges. They reached Ross's Grove at sunset, and stopped for the night at another grove a few miles beyond, where the party was considerably crowded in a small tavern, the ladies sleeping in the bar room and Miss Fuller being obliged to make her bed on the supper table.

She gives a witty description of a rather prim young English lady of the party, who would not go to sleep, but sat up all night wrapped in a blanket shawl, with a neat lace cap upon her head, shuddering and listening. While beds were scarce for such a large number, there was good tea, bread and wild strawberries, and the host was as hospitable as circumstances would permit. This was "Pawpaw Grove," in the southeastern part of Lee county and at one time afterward consisted of a blacksmith shop and a few stores; but little remains to mark

the former location. The next day they traveled across Lee county and in the afternoon reached the beautiful Rock river and crossed at Dixon's ferry. Between Dixon and Oregon is a stretch of river scenery of whose beauty few know who have not seen it, and one could scarcely realize that it is in this great prairie region of Northern Illinois. This is the Black Hawk Country, and there is but little wonder that the dusky warrior fought so hard to save the land of his fathers from the hands of the white man. Dixon was on the Boles trail from Peoria to Galena, built in 1826. Much traffic went by this route and the Indians did the ferrying. The next year a man from Peoria named Begordis, started a ferry, but the Indians burned the boat and advised the ferryman to return to Peoria, which he did. The next year Joe Ogie, a Frenchman, having an Indian wife, was permitted to run the ferry and afterwards Dixon, from whom the city was named, ran it for a long time and the place became a very important station on the early trail. It is now a prosperous city of some 10,000 inhabitants.

From Dixon they made excursions on the river in a boat. Perhaps the most beautiful place of all this region and one over which Miss Fuller was rightly enthusiastic, is that known as Hazelwood. We can best describe it as it was at that time in her words:

"The first place where we stopped was one of singular beauty, a beauty of soft, luxuriant wilderness. It was on the bend of the river, a place chosen by an Irish gentleman, whose absenteeism seems of the wisest kind, since, for a sum which would have been but a drop of water to the thirsty fever of his native land, he commands a residence which has all that is desirable, in its independence, its beautiful retirement, and means of benefit to others. His park, his deerchase, he found already prepared; he had only to make an avenue through it. This brought us to the house by a drive, which in the heat of noon seemed long, though afterwards, in the cool morning



and evening, delightful. This is, for that part of the world, a large and commodious dwelling. Near it stands the log cabin where its master lived while it was building, a very ornamental accessory. In the front of the house was a lawn, adorned by the most graceful trees. A few of these had been taken out to give a full view of the river, gliding through banks such as I have described. On this bend the bank is high and bold, so from the house of the lawn the view was very rich and commanding. But if you descended a ravine at the side of the water's edge, you found there a long walk on the narrow shore, with a wall above of the richest hanging wood, in which they said the deer lay hid."

The Irish gentleman mentioned by Miss Fuller was Alexander Charters. He came to this country from Belfast, where his family were engaged in the linen industry, and entered this land from the government at an early date. In 1838 he built a log cabin described by Miss Fuller, which still stands, covered with ivy and carefully kept up and added to in a style consistent with its original design, so that it often forms the summer home of the present owners of the estate, although the larger house is still standing. Mr. Charters was usually known as "Governor Charters" and made his home at Hazelwood until his death some eighteen or twenty years ago. He entertained there some of the famous men of the times, including Lincoln, Douglas, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Ward Beecher, John G. Saxe and others. Mr. Bryant spoke of the place as follows:

"Some of these (emigrants) have built elegant houses one the left bank of the River, amidst the noble trees which seem to have grown for that purpose, indeed, when I looked at them I could hardly persuade myself that they had not been planted to shadow older habitations. From the door of one of these dwellings I surveyed a prospect of exceeding beauty. The windings of the river allowed us a view of its waters and of its beautiful diversified

banks, to a great distance each way, and in one direction a high prairied region was seen above the woods that fringed the course of the river, of a brighter green than they and touched by the golden light of the setting sun."

At Governor Charter's death the estate passed to his son, who sold it to George Page, now deceased, president of a large condensed milk company, and from him it passed in turn to Senator Charles H. Hughes, who represented that locality in the State Legislature and who entertained there many of the prominent men of Illinois, and elsewhere. It is now the property of Mr. Hughes' daughter, and through the family much of this information has been obtained. The estate is still kept in fine condition and the magnificent lawn and the ravine are still there, and the walk along the water's edge at the base of the bluff is still narrow and tangled. Indeed, perhaps Miss Fuller in 1843, lost her hat-pin in scrambling through the projecting branches as did a lady of another driving party about sixty-five years after, while trying to follow her footsteps.

At Hazelwood Miss Fuller wrote a poem entitled "The Western Eden," which is given in her book, "At Home and Abroad." They stopped there three days and then proceeded to Oregon. Whether Miss Fuller visited Grand Detour does not appear from her account, but present travelers will miss one of the quaintest little places to be found in northern Illinois if they pass it by. Thwaites, in his "Historic Waterways," describes this peaceful place. It is a large bend in the Rock River and by walking a short distance either east or west one can reach portions of the river which are several miles apart, measured by water. There is a little gem of an Episcopal church, built years ago, which looks like a bit from an English landscape. The streets are grown with tall timothy which one hesitates to drive over with a team, so green and smiling it is. But best of all that inn, with its lavish stores of best country food; its creamed po-

tatoes, creamed strawberries, cream pies—no wonder the Grand Detour cows are rich producers of cream with those roadways of grass—its delicious fish, fresh caught from the Rock River, and presiding over all is the hospitable landlady, ever urging upon the lucky guests more of the good things.

Grand Detour was formerly a manufacturing place of considerable importance and the great Deere Plow Factory, now at Moline, was started there in 1839, by Messrs. Andrus and Deere. One of the members of the Andrus family still has in Grand Detour a residence, with a large lawn, containing one of the best examples of landscape gardening in this part of the State.

The Rock River furnishes a rich field for the fishers of fresh water clams and several camps may be found along its banks, where the fishermen reside, marked by hugh piles of the shells, which are shipped to be made into buttons. Numerous skiffs are to be seen on the river, the occupants engaged in this peculiar and not very exciting form of fishing.

After considerable difficulty, caused by trying to take a short cut, they reached the Black Hawk Indian trail and arrived at Oregon. Miss Fuller describes the river at this point as follows:

“At Oregon, the beauty of the scene was of even a more sumptuous character than at our former stopping place. Here swelled the river in its boldest course, interspersed by halcyon isles on which nature had lavished all her prodigality in trees, vine and flower, banked by noble bluffs, three hundred feet high, their sharp ridges as exquisitely definite as the edge of a shell; their summits adorned with those same beautiful trees, and with buttresses of rock, crested with old hemlocks, which wore a touching and antique grace amid the softer and more luxuriant vegetation. Lofty natural mounds rose amidst the rest, with the same lovely and sweeping outlines, showing everywhere the plastic power of water—water,

mother of beauty—which, by its sweet and eager flow, had left such lineaments as human genius never dreamt of. Not far from the river was a high craig, called the Pine Rock, which looks out, as our guide observed, like a helmet above the brow of the country.”

Oregon is now a thriving city of some 2,000 inhabitants, the county seat of Ogle county. Not far below the town is one of the best known farms in Illinois, known as “Sinissippi Farm.” This is the residence of Frank O. Lowden and his wife, who is the daughter of the late George M. Pullman, of sleeping car fame. It was formerly the old Hemingway farm, the old stone farm house being erected in 1846, several years after Miss Fuller was in that locality. It is now a model farm of about 1,500 acres, laid out with fine roads, excellent farm buildings and having several residences which would be a credit to any summer resort. Mr. Lowden generously opens up the farm to the inspection of all well disposed visitors on certain days of the week. A specialty is made of raising poultry and short-horned cattle. Oregon was the home of one of Margaret’s uncles, William Williams Fuller, who graduated at Harvard in 1813 and afterwards practiced law in Oregon, where he died in the year of Margaret’s visit.

Overhanging the river are clustered the cottages which form what is known as the “Artists’ Colony.” Here Lorado Taft, the sculptor, and many other artists spend their summers in their cozy and picturesque cottages. Not far distant from here is the gnarled tree known as “The Eagle’s Nest.” Miss Fuller visited it July 4th, 1843, and says: “It was the morning of the Fourth of July, and certainly I think I had never felt so happy that I was born in America. Woe to all country folks that never saw this spot, never swept an enraptured gaze over the prospect that stretched beneath. I do believe Rome and Florence are suburbs compared to this capital of Nature’s art. The bluff was decked with great bunches

of scarlet variety of the milkweed, like cut coral, and all starred with a mysterious looking flower, whose cup rose lonely on a tall stem. This had, for two or three days, disputed the ground with lupine and phlox. My companions disliked, I liked it." Here she wrote a long poem entitled, "Ganymede to His Eagle." The tree still stands and the trunk is covered with netting to protect it from the knives of enthusiastic souvenir hunters.

Miss Fuller and her party were the guests for three days of a family who lived on the bank opposite the town, but as the house was full, they slept in town, crossing the river morning and evening in boats. The Fourth of July oration was by a New Englander from Boston, and the pleasant day closed with dance and song. Another spot very near "Eagle's Nest," which Margaret Fuller made famous, is known as "Ganymede Springs." It gushes out, clear and cold, from the base of a lofty and sand stone bluff. A carriage drive runs along the river by the spring and a graceful stone landing has also been built. A marble tablet above the stream of water commemorates Miss Fuller's visit here.

Another spot connected with the subject of our article is known as Margaret Fuller's Island. It lies in the river not far from Eagle's Nest and is sometimes known as "Island Number One." It was owned by Edward A. Henshaw and C. Burr Artz in 1843. Mr. Henshaw owned several other tracts of land on that side of the river and designated his estate as "Hyde Park."

The party left Oregon the 6th day of July, the day being one of bright sunshine, varied by the purple shadows of large sweeping clouds. They drove up the bank of the Rock river, crossing the Kishwaukee river at noon, and afterwards reaching the little settlement of Kishwaukee, in Winnebago county. Miss Fuller notes among the plants she saw rattlesnake weed, compass plants, and the Western tea plant; and on the Kishwaukee, which she terms "the most graceful of streams," they saw many

large water lilies. A short distance south from Kishwaukee is Stillman's Valley. Of this locality Thwaites, in his "Historic Waterways," says: "It was in the large grove on the north bank, near its junction with the Rock, that Black Hawk, in the month of May, 1832, parleyed with the Pottawattomies. It was here that on the 14th of that month he learned of the treachery of Stillman's militiamen, and at once made that famous sally with his little band of forty braves which resulted in the rout of the cowardly whites, who fled pell-mell over the prairie toward Dixon, asserting that Black Hawk and two thousand blood-thirsty warriors were sweeping Northern Illinois with the besom of destruction. The country round about appears to have undergone no appreciable change in the half century intervening between that event and today. The topographical descriptions given in contemporaneous accounts of Stillman's flight will hold good now, and we were readily able to pick out the points of interest on the old battlefield."

At Kiswaukee they were entertained by a ragged and barefoot gentleman who told them many charming snake stories. Riding easterly along the Kishwaukee, through the little town of Cherry Valley and near Newburg, a settlement which has since disappeared entirely from the map, they reached the town of Belvidere. Miss Fuller's comments on this "stopping place" are not lengthy, being merely a reference to the tomb of Big Thunder and the fact that they found a "really good hotel." The author is of the opinion that the hotel referred to was the American House, which was then the best hotel between Chicago and Galena. It was a large wooden structure standing on the principal street, not far from the Kishwaukee river, and is still standing, although not used as a hotel. Big Thunder, to whom Miss Fuller refers, was an Indian chief, who lived about the time of the Sac War. Upon his death his body was wrapped in a blanket and placed in a "coop" built of logs, on the beautiful

mound where the court house now stands. As the burial place was on the stage road between Chicago and Galena, the travelers usually went up there while the horses and mail were being changed, at the Doty Tavern not far distant. Many jokes are still current in Belvidere of how one sturdy old settler was said to get his tobacco supply from the votive offerings placed at Big Thunder's feet by the Indians and also how obliging citizens carried up bags of sheep bones, so that no stage traveler need go away without an "original" relic of Big Thunder, long after the proper number of bones in his anatomy had been taken. One of the prominent early doctors sequestered the head and it was afterward used for phrenological purposes. Belvidere is now a wide awake city of about 10,000 inhabitants and the home of a large sewing machine plant. During the Civil War General Stephen A. Hurlbut and General Allen C. Fuller, Adjutant General of the State, went out from this place, with many others, in defense of the Union. Although Miss Fuller did not stop any length of time in Belvidere, she became financially interested in a school there. Whether she learned this location while she was in town or later does not appear, but on October 21, 1843, Arthur B. Fuller became the purchaser of Block Twenty, in the original town of Belvidere. Mr. Fuller was the younger brother of Margaret. He had just graduated from college and desired to conduct an academy. The tradition is that Miss Fuller's money purchased the property. The block so bought was situated very near the public square and present site of the court house in Belvidere, and is on a pleasant mound. It is still a fine location and must have been very attractive in the early days, when surrounded by woods. In the center of the block stood a building which had been erected about 1837. It was first called the Newton Academy and the trustees were prominent citizens of the community. Financial reverses had overtaken the pioneer academy and the land had passed

to the possession of a receiver, who was the grantor in the deed to Mr. Fuller. So far as the writer knows there is no one in Belvidere who personally remembers Mr. Fuller or his connection with the academy. There are some, however, who went to the old academy on the hill in the later years and one of the citizens who is still living went there as early as 1845. He describes the building as a square, two story structure, with ordinary desks and school rooms on both floors. It was out of the window of this building that one of the pupils jumped when he heard the whistle of the "Pioneer," the first engine which came through on the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad. This young enthusiast is said to have cut across lots down the hill and over to where the new wonder stood, pursued by the teacher, grabbing at his coat tail, perhaps only too glad for an excuse to see the great sight himself. Mr. Fuller ran the Belvidere Academy for less than a year and sold it March 29, 1845, to John Towner and Eben Conant. Augustus Conant's relatives had in their possession a number of letters from Mr. Fuller to the Unitarian minister, concerning the school, but they recently destroyed them. Mr. Fuller afterwards taught in the East, entered the army as chaplain and died in defense of the Union at Fredericksburg.

From Belvidere, by two days of very leisurely and devious route, the party reached Chicago, and Miss Fuller said, "thus ended a journey, which one at least of the party might have wished unending." They reached Chicago on a beautiful evening and Miss Fuller's account closes with a short poem, "Farewell to Rock River Valley." Her summing up of the trip is in these words: "I have not been particularly anxious to give the geography of the scene, inasmuch as it seemed to me no route, nor series of stations, but a garden interspersed with cottages, groves, and flower lawns, through which a stately river ran. I had no guide-book, kept no diary, do not know how many miles we traveled each day, nor



how many in all. What I got from the journey was the poetic impression of the country at large; it is all I have aimed to communicate."

Thus ended a little journey made by one of the country's most gifted women in what is now a most thriving, prosperous and intelligent part of the nation. It is a journey which is still well worth taking. To one accustomed to consider Illinois as flat, level country, it is a surprise. A drive over this region by a dweller in Chicago or its vicinity will open up a new vista of literary, historic and natural interest, which comparatively few have realized to exist so near their doors.